

AMENDING THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE ORGANIC ACT OF 1944 TO ENSURE THAT DEPENDENTS OF EMPLOYEES OF THE FOREST SERVICE STATIONED IN PUERTO RICO RECEIVE HIGH-QUALITY ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5042) to amend the Department of Agriculture Organic Act of 1944 to ensure that the dependents of employees of the Forest Service stationed in Puerto Rico receive a high-quality elementary and secondary education.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 5042

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. AUTHORITY TO COVER EXPENSES OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLING OF DEPENDENTS OF FOREST SERVICE PERSONNEL IN PUERTO RICO.

Section 202 of the Department of Agriculture Organic Act of 1944 (16 U.S.C. 554b) is amended—

(1) by inserting “(a) PROVISION OF MEDICAL CARE; RELATED TRANSPORTATION.—” before “Appropriations for the Forest Service”; and

(2) by adding at the end the following new subsection:

“(b) COVERAGE OF DEPENDENT EDUCATIONAL EXPENSES IN PUERTO RICO; RELATED TRANSPORTATION.—(1) Appropriations for the Forest Service shall be available to the Secretary of Agriculture to cover the cost of primary and secondary schooling of dependents of Forest Service personnel, who are stationed in Puerto Rico and are subject to transfer and reassignment to other locations in the United States, but not to exceed the costs authorized by the Department of Defense for the same area for dependents of members of the Armed Forces, when it is determined by the Secretary that the schools available in the area of Puerto Rico in which the dependents reside are unable to provide adequately for the education of the dependents.

“(2) If the Secretary determines that the school attended by a dependent described in paragraph (1) is not accessible by public means of transportation on a regular basis, the Secretary may provide, out of funds appropriated for the Forest Service, for the transportation of the dependent between the school and the place of residence of the dependent.”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE) and the gentleman from North Dakota (Mr. POMEROY) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE).

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 5042, introduced by the gentleman from Puerto Rico (Mr. ACEVEDO-VILÁ).

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 5042 amends the Department's Organic Act to allow the Secretary of Agriculture to cover tuition and transportation costs for dependents of Forest Service employees in Puerto Rico.

When the U.S. Naval Base at Roosevelt Roads closed its school, several

Forest Service employees lost the only nearby English language school available to their children. H.R. 5042 would allow the Department of Agriculture to reimburse tuition and transportation costs for these employees' dependents. Currently, several other Federal agencies, including the FAA, Department of Justice, and the Coast Guard, have made use of this authority for their employees assigned to Puerto Rico.

The bill should have minimal fiscal impact, as USDA was reimbursing the Department of Defense for the use of their school at the same rate authorized in this bill.

I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

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Mr. POMEROY. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I want the record once again to reflect that I am standing in for the ranking member, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) as he appears in the Committee on Rules arguing for consideration of an amendment that would allow the House to express its support for disaster relief for farmers similar to what was passed earlier by the Senate; \$3 billion for disaster relief for farmers was an amount established in the Senate consideration on this matter. Certainly, it was not all that some wanted, but it was viewed as a substantive response to the disaster need to our farmers.

It troubles me that some in the House are talking about no response, talking about doing whatever is necessary for Florida, by the way, I stand in strong support for a response of Florida, but leaving behind the losses faced in other agriculture production areas.

We all have to stand together, and the production loss of my farmers is just as devastating, albeit from other causes than hurricane losses, as the hurricane losses have been to the farmers in southern Florida.

Therefore, I wish the ranking member well in his testimony to the Committee on Rules. We will fully engage this debate tomorrow, but I want the record to reflect that the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) in my opinion is clearly advancing the interest of farmers tonight as he testifies to the Committee on Rules in favor of his disaster legislation, legislation supported by both Republicans and Democrats representing hard-hit areas of production agriculture.

That said, I will now read from the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM's) statements on behalf of H.R. 5042: “Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 5042, and I thank the gentleman from Puerto Rico (Mr. ACEVEDO-VILÁ) for bringing this issue before the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture.

“Until recently, 11 dependents of the Forest Service employees stationed in

Puerto Rico attended the DOD Educational Authority schools at the Naval Station Roosevelt Road. However, this naval station closed earlier this year at the direction of Congress. As a result, Federal Forest Service employees assigned to Puerto Rico are faced with limited choices and opportunities for their children's education. This could lead to loss of qualified staff of the Forest Service willing to work in Puerto Rico.

“While other Federal agencies have authority to reimburse their staff for educational expenses incurred by their dependents while assigned to Puerto Rico, the Forest Service has no similar authorization. This legislation, which is supported by the Forest Service, will simply employ authorization to the Forest Service to reimburse its staff for educational expenses incurred by their dependents when assigned to Puerto Rico.

“I encourage Members to support this simple but fair legislative solution.”

Mr. ACEVEDO-VILÁ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 5042. This legislation is an important step to provide access to stable and quality education for the dependents of our federal employees who are assigned to Puerto Rico. This is a non-controversial bill that will allow the dependents of USDA Forest Service employees to receive convenient, reliable and high quality education when assigned to Puerto Rico.

Until Naval Station Roosevelt Road's closure earlier this year, dependents of Forest Service employees who work at both the Caribbean National Forest and the International Institute of Tropical Forestry (IITF) had attended the DOD Educational Authority (DODEA) schools at NSRR, and the Forest Service reimbursed DODEA for the expense of educating its staff's dependents.

The closest DODEA school, at Fort Buchanan, is approximately a 1 to 1½ hour commute each way from their previous school, and therefore is not a convenient or suitable alternative. Most of the classes taught in Puerto Rico's public schools are in Spanish, and are not acceptable alternatives to English-based education for these federal employee dependents. Private schools, while close by, are an expensive cost to federal employees, and though other federal agencies, such as the U.S. Coast Guard, the Department of Justice, the Federal Aviation Administration and others have authority to reimburse their staff for educational expenses incurred by their dependents at private schools while assigned to Puerto Rico, the Forest Service has no similar authorization.

As a result, federal Forest Service employees assigned to Puerto Rico are faced with limited choices and opportunities for the continuing education of their dependents. This legislation will simply provide authorization to the Forest Service to reimburse its staff for educational expenses incurred by their dependents when assigned to Puerto Rico.

This bill is budget neutral, as it caps the Forest Service's reimbursement authority to not exceed the per-child amount previously reimbursed to the DODEA. The Forest Service supports this legislation.

I support this legislation and urge my colleagues to vote yes on this important fix to

allow the dependents of federal employees working for the Forest Service to receive the highest educational experience.

In closing, I would like to thank Agriculture Committee Chairman BOB GOODLATTE, ranking member CHARLES STENHOLM, and the committee staff of their assistance in quickly shepherding this bill through their committee and to the floor. I appreciate their help in addressing this important measure.

I urge my fellow members to support this measure, and to ensure that the dependents of our dedicated and professional Forest Service employees in Puerto Rico maintain convenient access to quality education.

Mr. POMEROY. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MURPHY). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 5042.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on H.R. 5042.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Virginia?

There was no objection.

AUTHORIZING THE SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE TO SELL OR EXCHANGE CERTAIN ADMINISTRATIVE SITES IN THE OZARK-ST. FRANCIS AND OUACHITA NATIONAL FORESTS

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill (S. 33) to authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to sell or exchange all or part of certain administrative sites and other land in the Ozark-St. Francis and Ouachita National Forests and to use funds derived from the sale or exchange to acquire, construct, or improve administrative sites.

The Clerk read as follows:

S. 33

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SALE OR EXCHANGE OF LAND.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Agriculture (referred to in this Act as the “Secretary”) may, under such terms and conditions as the Secretary may prescribe, sell or exchange any right, title, and interest of the United States in and to the following National Forest System land and improvements:

(1) In the Ouachita National Forest—

(A) tract 1, “Work Center and two Residences” (approximately 12.4 acres), as identified on the map entitled “Ouachita National Forest, Waldron, Arkansas, Work Center and Residences” and dated July 26, 2000;

(B) tract 2, “Work Center” (approximately 10 acres), as identified on the map entitled “Ouachita National Forest, Booneville, Arkansas, Work Center” and dated July 26, 2000;

(C) tract 3, “Residence” (approximately ½ acre), as identified on the map entitled “Ouachita National Forest, Glenwood, Arkansas, Residence” and dated July 26, 2000;

(D) tract 4, “Work Center” (approximately 10.12 acres), as identified on the map entitled “Ouachita National Forest, Thornburg, Arkansas, Work Center” and dated July 26, 2000;

(E) tract 5, “Office Building” (approximately 1.5 acres), as identified on the map entitled “Ouachita National Forest, Perryville, Arkansas, Office Building” and dated July 26, 2000;

(F) tract 6, “Several Buildings, Including Office Space and Equipment Depot” (approximately 3 acres), as identified on the map entitled “Ouachita National Forest, Hot Springs, Arkansas, Buildings” and dated July 26, 2000;

(G) tract 7, “Isolated Forestland” (approximately 120 acres), as identified on the map entitled “Ouachita National Forest, Sunshine, Arkansas, Isolated Forestland” and dated July 26, 2000;

(H) tract 8, “Isolated Forestland” (approximately 40 acres), as identified on the map entitled “Ouachita National Forest, Sunshine, Arkansas, Isolated Forestland” and dated July 26, 2000;

(I) tract 9, “Three Residences” (approximately 9.89 acres), as identified on the map entitled “Ouachita National Forest, Heavener, Oklahoma, Three Residences” and dated July 26, 2000;

(J) tract 10, “Work Center” (approximately 38.91 acres), as identified on the map entitled “Ouachita National Forest, Heavener, Oklahoma, Work Center” and dated July 26, 2000;

(K) tract 11, “Residence #1” (approximately 0.45 acres), as identified on the map entitled “Ouachita National Forest, Talihina, Oklahoma, Residence #1” and dated July 26, 2000;

(L) tract 12, “Residence #2” (approximately 0.21 acres), as identified on the map entitled “Ouachita National Forest, Talihina, Oklahoma, Residence #2” and dated July 26, 2000;

(M) tract 13, “Work Center” (approximately 5 acres), as identified on the map entitled “Ouachita National Forest, Big Cedar, Oklahoma, Work Center” and dated July 26, 2000;

(N) tract 14, “Residence” (approximately 0.5 acres), as identified on the map entitled “Ouachita National Forest, Idabel, Oklahoma, Residence” and dated July 26, 2000;

(O) tract 15, “Residence and Work Center” (approximately 40 acres), as identified on the map entitled “Ouachita National Forest, Idabel, Oklahoma, Residence and Work Center” and dated July 26, 2000; and

(P) tract 16, “Isolated Forestland” at sec. 30, T. 2 S., R. 25 W. (approximately 2.08 acres), as identified on the map entitled “Ouachita National Forest, Mt. Ida, Arkansas, Isolated Forestland” and dated August 27, 2001.

(2) In the Ozark-St. Francis National Forest—

(A) tract 1, “Tract 750, District 1, Two Residences, Administrative Office” (approximately 8.96 acres), as identified on the map entitled “Ozark-St. Francis National Forest, Mountain View, Arkansas, Tract 750, District 1, Two Residences, Administrative Office” and dated July 26, 2000;

(B) tract 2, “Tract 2736, District 5, Mountainburg Work Center” (approximately 1.61 acres), as identified on the map entitled “Ozark-St. Francis National Forest, Mountainburg, Arkansas, Tract 2736, District 5, Mountainburg Work Center” and dated July 26, 2000;

(C) tract 3, “Tract 2686, District 6, House” (approximately 0.31 acres), as identified on the map entitled “Ozark-St. Francis National Forest, Paris, Arkansas, Tract 2686, District 6 House” and dated July 26, 2000;

(D) tract 4, “Tract 2807, District 6, House” (approximately 0.25 acres), as identified on the map entitled “Ozark-St. Francis National Forest, Paris, Arkansas, Tract 2807, District 6, House” and dated July 26, 2000;

(E) tract 5, “Tract 2556, District 3, Dover Work Center” (approximately 2.0 acres), as identified on the map entitled “Ozark-St. Francis National Forest, Dover, Arkansas, Tract 2556, District 3, Dover Work Center” and dated July 26, 2000;

(F) tract 6, “Tract 2735, District 2, House” (approximately 0.514 acres), as identified on the map entitled “Ozark-St. Francis National Forest, Jasper, Arkansas, Tract 2735, District 2, House” and dated July 26, 2000; and

(G) tract 7, “Tract 2574, District 2, House” (approximately 0.75 acres), as identified on the map entitled “Ozark-St. Francis National Forest, Jasper, Arkansas, Tract 2574, District 2, House” and dated July 26, 2000.

(b) APPLICABLE AUTHORITIES.—Except as otherwise provided in this Act, any sale or exchange of land described in subsection (a) shall be subject to laws (including regulations) applicable to the conveyance and acquisition of land for National Forest System purposes.

(c) CASH EQUALIZATION.—Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary may accept cash equalization payments in excess of 25 percent of the total value of the land described in subsection (a) from any exchange under subsection (a).

(d) SOLICITATIONS OF OFFERS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—In carrying out this Act, the Secretary may use solicitations of offers for sale or exchange under this Act on such terms and conditions as the Secretary may prescribe.

(2) REJECTION OF OFFERS.—The Secretary may reject any offer under this Act if the Secretary determines that the offer is not adequate or not in the public interest.

SEC. 2. DISPOSITION OF FUNDS.

Any funds received by the Secretary through sale or by cash equalization from an exchange—

(1) shall be deposited into the fund established by Public Law 90-171 (commonly known as the “Sisk Act”) (16 U.S.C. 484a); and

(2) shall be available for expenditure, without further Act of appropriation, for the acquisition, construction, or improvement of administrative facilities, land, or interests in land for the national forests in the States of Arkansas and Oklahoma.

SEC. 3. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.

There are authorized to be appropriated such sums as are necessary to carry out this Act.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PEARCE). Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE).

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.